

VZCZCXRO6472  
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL  
DE RUEHBUL #1863/01 1950532  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 140532Z JUL 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0143  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001863

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM  
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA  
USFOR-A FOR POLAD

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: Paktya: Presidential-PC Politics Intertwined

11. (SBU) Summary: Provincial Council (PC) and presidential campaigns are in full swing in Paktya. Given poor security in the districts, most campaigning is occurring in the provincial capital of Gardez. The majority of influential Paktyans say they will throw their support behind President Karzai, as they are sure he will be reelected, but few people are openly campaigning for him. The current members of the PC are all running for reelection and are pooling resources to gain votes. They have told PRT they plan to step in to direct Karzai's provincial campaign, but only if the President throws his support behind them. End Summary.

12. (U) PRT rep discussed the Provincial Council (PC) campaign on July 8 with its three of its current members, who said they are working together to get re-elected. The Paktyans' unified strategy is consistent with the way politics is practiced in this conservative and highly tribal part of the country. By contrast, there is a less unified approach in Loya ("Greater") Paktya's other two provinces, Khost and Paktika.

13. (U) Campaigning for both the PC and the presidential election is taking place primarily in the provincial capital of Gardez, given the security constraints and reportedly widespread insurgent anti-election intimidation efforts outside the city. The PRT has only seen campaign posters in Gardez. The PC members tell us they are campaigning primarily by holding shuras in Gardez with tribal elders from across the province, hoping those elders will take a message of support back to their respective villages. One member said that while the current PC feels it has let the people down in some ways, it has done the best it could given its extremely limited resources to represent peoples' interests. However, he asserted that the performance of Paktya's PC has far exceeded those of most other provinces, and that the PC has commendations from Kabul to prove it.

14. (U) Given the low level of overt political activity and lack of campaign headquarters, meeting with non-incumbent candidates is extremely difficult. Even locally employed PRT staff say that many of the PC candidates are "unknowns" to the political scene. Several candidates have complained, however, that they do not feel comfortable campaigning outside the capital. At least two candidates from insurgent-filled Zormat district have reportedly suspended their campaigns due to intimidation.

15. (U) More attention in the province is focused on the presidential election than the PC race. Three candidates - President Karzai, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, and Abdullah Abdullah - have regional offices established in Gardez. Rallies among provincial leaders and tribal elders take one of two forms: are either stridently critical of the current government or more restrained in promoting civic participation. However, none of these events call explicitly for the election of any particular presidential candidate. The reticence of leaders to throw their support publicly behind any individual candidate reflects the continuing jockeying for support behind the scenes.

15. (SBU) Incumbent PC candidates told PRT July 8 that they are

prepared to assume control of the reelection effort for Karzai, on the condition that he reciprocate public support for them. If Karzai would not back them, they said they would support Ghani or Abdullah, but said they preferred to support Karzai. That stance is consistent with most provincial leaders, who expect Karzai to win Paktya.

¶6. (U) Despite reports that certain provincial leaders are working for Karzai, few people admit to working actively on his behalf. Most appear to be waiting until the last moment in case another candidate takes the lead. One exception is Wolesi Jirga Member Gulpacha Majidi, who was in Paktya recently and rebutted the most common arguments among Paktyans regarding the failure of the current administration. There are other exceptions among prominent Paktyans.

¶7. (SBU) Others who are reportedly working for Karzai are more coy, including Governor Hamdard. During an early July conversation, Hamdard held his cards close. The only substantive comment he allowed himself was a question, slyly asking whether we expect a first-round winner in the election. His query suggests anticipates a Karzai victory, with his only remaining question now being by how wide a margin.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: In Paktya, all signs point to President Karzai carrying the day. Most likely, the current members of the Provincial Council will also do well, though that is less certain given their low-profile campaign strategies. The preference for traditional politicking and the limits on public campaigning outside the capital lend an air of obscurity to the elections, which are now less than six weeks away.

KABUL 00001863 002 OF 002

EIKENBERRY